

II. VALUES: A VISION FOR THE LAKEFRONT

Through a series of structured brainstorming sessions and written exercises, the members of the task force described and discussed their vision of the lakefront's future. Despite the size and diversity of its membership, the task force quickly agreed on ten key elements of a vision for the lakefront. The elements which were identified and the rationale behind them are:

An Accessible Lakefront

Almost all of the shoreland in the study area is publicly owned. Parkland is 66 percent of the study area shoreline. This achievement is the result of over one hundred years of consistent public effort and investment -- no lakefront public land exists today which was not acquired from private ownership or created by fill from public waters.

The task force recognizes that the development of this public resource presumed that it would be available to the public and that quality access is essential if it is to be truly available. The types of access which are needed: pedestrian pathways, bike paths, transit access and handicapped access. Not only access to the water's edge but also access onto the water is desired: for example, opportunities to swim, to sail, to ride water taxis, or to ride excursion boats. The task force also emphasizes the need to preserve and enhance visual access. The task force particularly notes that shoreline protection structures should be designed to facilitate and not deny access to the water.

The task force discussed at some length the unique appeal of the water and that the lakefront is the place where people encounter a unique environment, one in which people can never permanently reside, one which they can only visit. Access is essential if city residents are to have an appreciation of this special environment which is physically close but dramatically different from everyday experience.

The task force understands that access to all parts of the study area will not be available at all times and in all circumstances. The public must be protected from hazards and private property must be protected from theft and vandalism. But the task force believes that proper design can achieve safety while maximizing access and maintaining an inviting appearance if the need for accessibility is explicitly considered by the designer.

Open Space

The task force found open space to be an essential ingredient in a desirable future lakefront. "Open" does not mean "unused." Rather the task force intends such space to be well used for both organized and unorganized recreational activities. Open space should invite use and present potential users with a variety of options for passive and active recreation.

"Open" means that the space and any improvements on it, whether a structure or a playing field, allow multipurpose use and not permanently foreclose

alternative future uses. The task force particularly endorsed Milwaukee County's approach to improvements on the Veterans Park site. There, the County is providing the water and electricity needed for special events in an unobtrusive manner which does not hinder the site's use as a large, flexible, open space for activities such as kite flying, sun bathing, in-line skating, and jogging, but also allows more formally programmed activity.

"Open," as identified by the task force, also means "open to the water." Open space was viewed as facilitating the accessibility which the task force desires. It also is essential for the "land side" of water recreation: the open lands which are beaches, boat launches, and fishing places.

Boating

The study area is home to many boating facilities: two public marinas, two yacht clubs, three public boat launching facilities, the facilities of several nonprofit sailing organizations, and numerous private docking places along the portion of the Milwaukee River within the study area.

These facilities serve a wide variety of boating interests and income levels. Continued expansion of a variety of boating facilities and boating opportunities should be encouraged and are consistent with the values of accessibility and diversity.

Projects which are consistent with this, such as the home pier for a proposed replica of a Great Lakes schooner, facilities for transient boaters, and mooring facilities along the Milwaukee River, are particularly encouraged.

Museums

The study area is now home to the Milwaukee Art Museum. Currently, The Children's Museum plans to relocate to O'Donnell Park. The task force recognizes these museums as assets and facilities which should continue in the study area in the future. The task force sees that these museums both contribute to and gain from a location near the lakefront: they attract some visitors to the lakefront who would otherwise not come, they attract visitors during the "off-season," and their location provides a supplemental reason for people to visit them.

The task force believes any new museum development should not use public land at the water's edge. This land should be used for activities which relate directly to the water. However, a maritime museum would be "water related" and an acceptable water's edge use.

The task force also recognizes the need of the Milwaukee Art Museum to expand its facility on the War Memorial Center site. It endorses expansion which will retain public accessibility to the lake edge and will be sympathetic to the architectural integrity of the 1957 Eero Saarinen War Memorial.

Food Service

Restaurants, and other types of food service, are seen as ways to increase public activity on and enjoyment of the lakefront and the river. In some cases, food service is a necessity. The north-south distances along the lakefront, the east-west distances between the water's edge and the closest private lands, and physical barriers such as the bluffs require that food service be provided on public lands if it is to be available at all to the people involved in lakefront recreation. The task force also sees quality, sit-down restaurants as desirable as an alternative way to experience the waterfront, one which appeals to persons who would not otherwise visit and which increases public use in the evening hours and during the colder months.

The task force does not see food service in the study area as an end in itself but as supportive and ancillary to the broad range of lakefront activities. Any use of lakefront land for food service facilities should be compatible with the other aspects of this vision: access to the water's edge should be facilitated, not blocked; the amount of public land used should be minimized; and mixed-use developments should be encouraged, for example, food service sharing a building and parking with a chandlery or public lockers and rest rooms.

Fishing

The task force recognizes fishing as a desirable lakefront activity. This was not merely a recognition of the obvious -- that fishing is currently a major lakefront recreational activity and that Milwaukee's lakefront is regarded as a good place to catch fish. It was also an awareness that fishing is an activity which does not require a large investment in equipment or special training. It is an activity with broad appeal, one in which anyone can participate. It is also recognition that fishing adds beneficially to the character of the lakefront. It is something for other visitors to watch. It increases the public's awareness of the lake as a home to wildlife.

The task force sees fishing as particularly consistent with its vision of an accessible waterfront. The providing of ample opportunities to get to the water's edge also makes fishing easier.

Festivals

The task force endorses the lakefront as a site for public festivals. This includes not merely Summerfest and the ethnic festivals held at Maier Festival Park, but also the festivals hosted on Milwaukee County parklands: the Lakefront Festival of the Arts, Maritime Days, and the Great Circus Parade. The task force recognized many advantages to such activity on the downtown lakefront:

- Festivals are an organized means of bringing people to the lakefront. The two attractions are mutually reinforcing.
- The large open spaces needed for festivals exist on the lakefront.

- Festivals can be part of mixed use/multiple use programming of an area.
- The Maier Festival Park, O'Donnell Park and Veterans Park sites have the infrastructure needed for festivals and are accessible: they can tap downtown parking supply and transit routes.
- The downtown lakefront location, adjacent to the most intensively developed area of the state, contributes to a critical mass of activity. The festivals draw attendance from the surroundings. The festivals can, in turn, stimulate development in surrounding areas.

Diversity

The task force believes the use of the waterfront by a diverse mix of people is essential. The waterfront should be perceived as an inviting, welcoming place where people of different racial and ethnic heritage, different social or economic status, and different degrees of physical ability can feel comfortable.

This diversity is desirable in itself, but is particularly important on the lakefront because of the extensive public ownership of the land and in order to reinforce awareness that the lakefront is owned by everyone. The task force also feels that, because of the diversity of people residing and working near the lakefront and its broad appeal, achieving a diverse mix of visitors is practical as well as desirable.

Environmental Quality

The task force sees clean waterways, clean air, and a clean, green landscape as desirable features for the study area. The members emphasize that existing environmental assets, such as the lakefront parklands, should be preserved. Aspects of the environment which require improvement are:

- water quality sufficient to support recreational use, particularly along the river portion of the study area,
- intrusion of noise, automobile exhaust, and trash - especially broken glass - in parklands, and
- protection of areas designed for low intensity use from over-use and maintenance of some areas as passive and natural areas.

O'Donnell Park

The task force recognizes O'Donnell Park as a welcome addition to the study area. Features of the project which are particularly desirable are that its design combines structures and open space in a way which echoes its location on the boundary between the office district and the lakefront, that it completes development of an area of the lakefront which had been the site of unattractive temporary uses, and that it provides an attractive "gateway" feature between the lakefront and downtown literally bridging the two areas.